



**International Conference
on Buddhist Meditation Practices,
namely,
"Outlook on Self-identity Beyond the Concept"
(*Dhammanupassana*)**

Title for Presentation : **Dhammanupassana as Instructed by the Most Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw**

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1. Introduction

Dear participants, Respected Sayadaws, Rectors, Professors, Lecturers, Teachers, Organizers and Observers:

May all of you be well, happy, healthy and wealthy!

As Meditation Master of Mahasi Sasana Yeiktha and Principal of Mahasi International Training School for Foreign Buddhist Missions I am happy to be discussing principles of meditation with you all. Although ITBMU has held these conferences three times and this is the fourth international conference, this is the first experience for me in this University. I am honored to be presented with this opportunity.

In the last three conferences, *Kayanupassana Satipatthana*, *Vedanupassana Satipatthana* and *Cittanupassana Satipatthana* were the three themes covered, respectively. However, among the four kinds of *Satipatthana* discussed in the *Abhidhamma*, *Dhammanupassana Satipatthana* is the most difficult to understand.

I have prepared these papers focusing on *Dhammanupassana* as it was taught by Mahasi Sayadaw, drawing from his books and Dhamma talks. I will be presenting these papers at this conference on behalf of the Mahasi Meditation Centre. Mahasi Sayadaw delivered many discourses over his lifetime, many of which were translated into English by renowned scholars and published by the Buddha Sasana Nuggaha Organization. Of the over 100 books by Mahasi Sayadaw written in Myanmar, just over 40 have been translated into English.

I look forward to a productive conference!

Sincerely,

2. *Satipatthana* Meditation

At one time, many people, especially in the West, thought that meditation was only for recluses, monks, yogis and hermits. It appears that we are now past this misconception. Today, interest in meditation is growing all over the world. In addition to being practiced more widely, it has also become a subject of academic study and has even become an object of scientific research.

However, it should be remembered that meditation is not a 'modern' practice. From time immemorial, people have been practicing meditation in different ways. Most religions in the world either teach or have taught some form of meditation or mental training for inner development. Examples would be some forms of prayer, reading individually or collectively from holy scripture, or concentrating on some sacred

object, person or idea. What all of these activities have in common is that they are creative processes which aim at converting chaotic feelings and unwholesome thoughts into mental harmony and purity. Thus, meditation also serves as effective therapy for the problems of modern life. Many practitioners believe that when the mind is trained through meditation, it can perceive things that are beyond the range of normal senses.

Yogis, saints and Enlightened Ones of all ages have taken the path of meditation and have attributed all of their achievements to their meditative practice. The Buddhist tradition holds that there never was, nor ever will be any significant mental development or mental purity without meditation. Meditation is the means by which *Siddhattha Gotama*, the *Buddha*, gained supreme enlightenment. However, it should be noted that the benefits obtained through meditation do not come immediately and all at once. Rather, they are obtained gradually, through systematic training and practice.

The fact is that meditation training is systematic. That is why some practitioners take their 'lineage' very seriously. Our teacher, Mahasi Sayadaw was a disciple of *Venerable Mingun Jetavun Sayadaw*. His practice of meditation descends from another teacher, *Theelon Sayadaw*, in a line of unbroken continuity. According to scripture, *Theelon Sayadaw's* lineage can be traced back to *Shin Arahan* of *Bagan*. Theravada Buddhist tradition holds that *Shin Arahan's* practice traces all the way back to *Venerable Upali*, who was one of the immediate disciples of *Lord Buddha*.

'The Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satipatthana Sutta*)' is one of the most important discourses delivered by Lord Buddha. It occurs twice in the Buddhist canon. The opening line reads as follows: "*Satipatthana* is the one way for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the destruction of pain and grief, for reaching the right path and for the attainment of *Nibbana*". The Four Foundations of Mindfulness are:

1. *Kayanupassana Satipatthana*,
2. *Vedanupassana Satipatthana*,
3. *Cittanupassana Satipatthana* and
4. *Dhammanupassana Satipatthana*."

Previous conferences have already addressed the first three Foundations including 'Mindfulness of Mental States' or *Cittanupassana*. Here, through mindfulness of *Dhamma*, mental concepts or thoughts that lead to suffering are kept in check, which leads one further toward the overcoming of suffering.

The *Dhammanupassana Satipatthana* constitutes the subject of my presentation. The Buddha said of the *Dhammanupassana*: *Dhammesu dhammanupassī viharati atapi, sampajano, satima vineyya loke abhijjha domanassam*" This is translation of the Pali texts; "He lives contemplating mental objects in mental objects, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, having overcome, in this world, covetousness and grief."

As with other ancient languages, there is sometimes no unproblematic way to translate some Pali sentences into English. This one is no exception. Nevertheless, understanding what this sentence says becomes important once the meditator deepens his or her practice.

3. What is *Dhammanupassana*?

The fourth section of the *Mahāsātipatthana Sutta* talks about what we may call 'Mindfulness of *Dhammas*' or Mindfulness of mental objects or in other words Mindfulness of the 'facts of life' or 'factors of reality' or 'factors understanding which would help a person realize *Nibbana*.'

First, we'll need to address some technicalities in order to clear up potential confusions regarding the word 'Dhamma'. Again, like other ancient languages, Pali contains words that may mean many different things when used in different contexts. The word 'Dhamma' sometimes means what we would mean by the phrase 'conceptual explanation'. It may also mean what we would mean by the word 'law', either in the legal sense or as in the phrase 'law of nature'. It may also have ethical connotations, as in 'laws followed by good people'. However, in this case we often see the prefix 'sa' to form the word 'saddhamma'. The prefix 'a' to form the word 'adhamma' indicates laws followed by bad people who harm themselves and others. 'Dhamma' is also used to mean 'something that holds one from falling into lower or woeful states of exist-

ence or woeful mental states' (The phrase 'Akusala Dhamma' is often used in this sense).

Finally, in Abhidhamma, or what we may call for now 'Buddhist Philosophy', the word 'dhamma' may be used to indicate one of the nine 'Supra-Mundane Factors', which are grouped into three categories: Paths (four of them), Fruits (four of them), and Nibbana (for a total of nine). So Dhammanupassana Satipatthana may be understood as the state of mind by means of which a person becomes aware of these Factors. Thus, a person becomes aware of that which leads to 'Right Understanding' and so Nibbana, as well as that which hinders a person from reaching this goal.

All of this may sound rather complicated, so here is another way to explain it.

Dhammanupassana Satipatthana may be thought of as stating where Cittanupassana Satipatthana, described briefly above, leaves off. Here, we ask: What do we actually do with our mind? What do our minds do when they are in what philosophers call 'different mental states'?

For starters, our minds traffic in what we call thoughts, beliefs, concepts, views, opinions etc. that are (in some sense) about things we come across, may come across, or have come across in the past. The problem is that we often experience the world in such a way that many of these thoughts, beliefs, concepts, views, opinions, etc. become unhealthy, or even downright harmful, both to ourselves and to others. Through Dhammanupassana Satipatthana, it becomes easier to separate those experiences from the concepts etc. that we form, thus leading to a deeper understanding of those experiences.

4. Overview of Dhammas or Facts/Factors

Mindfulness of mental objects may sound like a new kind of meditation practice, but it is just another way of describing the insight practice that you are already doing. "Mental Objects" refers to thought- which here means all conscious mental activities. Thoughts have five categories:

1. the five hindrances - *Panca Nivarana*,
2. the five aggregates of existence - *Pancakkhandha*,
3. the six pairs of internal and external bases - *Ayatana*,
4. the seven factors of enlightenment - *Satta Bojjhanga*,
5. the four noble truths - *Catu Sacca*.

They may arise in any order. Mindfulness of *Dhammas* or Factors is practiced by becoming aware of these.

1. Five hindrances- *Panca Nivarana*,

The Five hindrances are called such because they cover *Nibbana* from the mind. '*Vara*' is used here to mean '*Nibbana*', and '*Ni*' is the prefix for negation. When one of the Five Hindrances are present, wholesome, virtuous or good thoughts do not arise. A person who wants to attain proper concentration or '*samadhi*' has to suppress these Five Hindrances.

One does not develop insight by saying to oneself 'I have such and such a thought'. Rather, one must simply become aware that such and such a thought or feeling has arisen and/or passed away. To form such an explicit proposition in one's mind is sure to lead to distraction.

The Five Hindrances are: 1. *Kamacchanda* (sensual desire), 2. *Vyapada* (anger or ill-will), 3. *Thinamiddha* (sloth and torpor), 4. *Uddhacca Kukkucca* (restless state of mind and remorse) and 5. *Vicikiccha* (doubt).

2. Five Aggregates- *Pancakkhandha*,

The five aggregates of existence are: 1. *Rupakkhandha* (matter or form), 2. *Vedanakkhandha* (feelings or sensations), 3. *Sannakkhandha* (perception), 4. *Sankkharakkhandha* (volitional activities) and 5. *Vinnanakkhandha* (consciousness).

3. Bases Associated with Six Senses- *Ayatana*,

The six pairs of internal and external bases are: 1. *Cakkhayatana* (eye) *Rupayatana* (visible object), 2. *Sotayatana* (ear) *Saddayatana* (sound), 3. *Ghanayatana* (nose) *Gandhayatana* (smell or odour), 4. *Jahvayatana* (tongue) *Rasayatana* (taste), 5. *Kayayatana* (body) *Photthabbhayatana* (tangible object) and 6. *Manayatana* (mind) *Dhammayatana* (cognizable object).

4. Seven Enlightenment Factors- *Satta Bojjhanga*,

The seven factors of enlightenment are; 1. *Sati Sambhojjhango* (mindfulness), 2. *Dhammavicaya Sambhojjhango* (investigation of the truth), 3. *Viriya Sambhojjhango* (effort), 4. *Piti Sambhojjhango* (rapture), 5. *Passaddhi Sambhojjhango* (quietude), 6. *Samadhi Sambhojjhango* (concentration) and 7. *Upekkha Sambhojjhango* (equanimity).

5. Four Noble Truths- *Catu Sacca*.

The four noble truths are; 1. *Dukkha Sacca* (the truth of suffering), 2. *Samudaya Sacca* (the truth of the cause of suffering), 3. *Nirodha Sacca* (the truth of the cessation of suffering), and 4. *Magga Sacca* (the truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering).

Here, under this topic, we have just mentioned mindfulness of factors or Dhammas or thoughts in a brief manner and will be discussed in details in the next sections according to Mahasi Sayadaw's method.

5. Mahasi Meditation

The following questions and answers were written by Mahasi Sayadaw, and we recite them before we start our daily Dhamma talk at the Fan Yin Dhamma Hall of Mahasi Sasana Yeiktha. Those wishing to understand the Mahasi Meditation Method must learn these questions and answers by heart.

1. How is insight developed?

In Myanmar language- you can say as; "vi-pat-tha-nar-nyan-so-tar-bai-har-shu-yway-phyit-tha-nee?". "swae-lan-nai-yar-ngarr-khan-dar-hman-swar-shu-yway-phyit-tha-tee" etc.

1. Insight is developed by meditating on the five aggregates of grasping.

This is the answer of the above question 'How is insight developed?'. We have to meditate on the five aggregates of grasping to develop insight. By meditating only on the five aggregates of grasping, we can reduce clinging to our *Rupa*(matter), *Vedana*(feeling), *Sanna*(perception), *Sankhara*(volitional activities) and *Vinnana*(consciousness).

2. Why and when do we meditate on the aggregates?

This question indicates time and reason to meditate.

2. We meditate on the aggregates whenever they arise in order that we do not cling to them.

These questions and answers require explanation for those who are unfamiliar with the concepts involved.

The five aggregates of grasping are enumerated as *matter, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness*. These are both (a) ultimate constituents of sentient beings; and (b) those entities which arise and pass away in our moment to moment experience. As such, we experience them all the time. When you see, what you see ultimately are the five aggregates. When you hear, what you hear ultimately are the five aggregates. When you smell, taste, touch or think, they are all that is there.

When you bend, stretch or move your limbs, the aggregates are what are bending, stretching or moving. The problem is that you do not recognize them as such. This is because you have not meditated on them, and thus you do not know them for what they are. It is this because of this lack of knowledge that you grasp them with craving and wrong views.

What happens when you bend your arm? It begins with an intention to bend your arm. Then come the various other features of 'bending an arm' one by one. In the intention to bend are the four mental aggregates.

1. That without which there would be no intending is the consciousness.

2. The feelings are associated with the bending. These may be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral depending upon the circumstances.

3. That which recognizes the bending as bending is perception.

4. Finally, there is that mental state which urges you to bend. This is what in Western philosophy is called a volition. It is one type of mental formation.

So in the intention to bend there are feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness- the four mental aggregates. Of course, there also has to be an arm to bend. This is matter. So the intention to bend and the bending itself are constituted by the Five Aggregates.

You move, but really the five aggregates are what is moving. You move again, but really the five aggregates move again. But if you have not meditated on them, then you do not know them for what they are.

3. If we fail to meditate on mind and matter as they arise clings arise.
4. We cling to them as permanent, good and as ego.
5. If we meditate on mind and matter as they arise, clings do not arise.
6. It is plainly seen that all are impermanent, suffering, mere processes.
7. Once clings cease, the Path arises leading to Nibbana.
8. These, then, are the elements of Insight Meditation.

In conclusion, if you want to realize Nibbana, what is important is to work for freedom from clinging. For ordinary people clings arise everywhere: in seeing, in hearing, in touching, in being aware. They cling to things as being permanent, as being happy, good, as soul, ego, persons. We must work for a complete freedom from these clings.

To work is to meditate on whatever rises, whatever is seen, heard, touched, thought of. If you keep meditating thus, clings cease to be, the Noble (Ariyan) Path arises leading to Nibbana. This is the process. These are essentials of Mahasi Meditation. The underlined sentences are translation of Myanmar language original instructed by Mahasi Sayadaw.

6. The Practice of *Dhammanupassana Satipatthana*

In this section, we are going to discuss the practice of *Dhammanupassana Satipatthana* as instructed by Mahasi Sayadaw and as I understood. Mahasi Sayadaw taught about the *Dhammanupassana* in his famous books on (1) *Vipassana* (Spiritual Insight) and (2) *Fundamentals of Vipassana Meditation* as mentioned below:

"Whatever arises that is neither concerned with (a) *body* movements and postures, nor with (b) consciousness and processes of thought or impression, nor with (c) *vedana* (feelings, sensations), is *dhamma* (conditions of existence, characteristics of phenomena). This is exemplified by such conditions or characteristics as the mere fact of the perception of sight or sound, etc. Thus, while one is focusing one's attention and mindfulness on the heave and fall of the abdominal wall, one must take mental note of (a) incidence of visual perception should one see an object; (b) incidence of auditory perception should one hear a sound; and (c) incidence of olfactory perception should one smell something. Similarly, if while eating, one gets the taste of what is being eaten, mental note must be made of the incidence of gustatory perception. When contact is felt, the incidence of tactile perception must be noted mentally; when a certain idea or thought arises, this idea or thought must be recognized and noted mentally. Such recognition and mindfulness is in accordance with statements like "*Cakkhumca pajanati; rupeca pajanati*" made in the *Ayatana Dhammanupassana* exegesis." (p-79 A discourse on *Vipassana* Spiritual Insight by Mahasi Sayadaw)

In this paragraph, Sayadawgyi explained about the *Ayatana Dhammanupassana* to understand clearly. In the next paragraph *Nivarana Dhammanupassana* has explained.

"When a craving or desire for something arises, this condition or state of craving must be recognized and noted mentally. When one likes or feels attachments for a certain object, this condition or state of affection must be recognized and noted in the mind. This is a brief account of the method of establishing mindfulness of *Kamucchanda*. When *Vya pada* (anger, ill-will, malevolence, hatred) arises, this must also be recognized and noted in the mind. Similarly, one must take mental note of *Thinamiddha* (sloth and torpor), *Uddhacca* (restless state of mind, mental distraction, flurry), and *Kukkucca* (remorse), as they arise. If wrong views or doubt (*Vicikiccha*) about Buddha and His teaching (*Dhamma*) arise, they must be mentally noted as wrong views. Sometimes one may mistakenly interpret the arising of such wrong views as an exercise of critical intellectual analysis. If, while observing mindfulness of the rising and falling movements of abdominal wall, one contemplates about the methods applied to the practice of the *Dhamma*, one must take mental note of this contemplation. Such mindful observance is in accord with statements made in the *Nivarana Dhammanupassana Satipatthana* exegesis."

" If, while attention is being focused on mindful observance of the heave and fall of the abdominal wall, any characteristic of the phenomena of visual or auditory perceptions, of craving and attachment, etc., take note of the characteristic and be mindfully aware of it."

" When such mindfulness is developed nothing should remain unknown. Whatever arises in the *Khandha* aggregate would all come under mindful observance and awareness. All that needs to be recognized and covered by mindfulness had been dealt with. All body movements and postures should be noted as they are made or assumed; all forms of consciousness and processes of thought; and all sensations or feelings should be noted as they arise. Similarly, all conditions and characteristics of phenomena should also be noted as they arise conspicuously. This covers the practice of all four *Satipatthana* disciplines."

" There are some people who think that the method of practising *Satipatthana* that is being described is concerned only with mindfulness of the heave and fall of the abdominal wall, and pass adverse criticism thereon. This is not true. Based on mindfulness of the heave and fall of the abdominal wall, every feeling, thought, or phenomenon that arises is recognized and mentally noted. Instructions have been given to the effect that when *Bhanga Nana* is attained, no basis is needed. The ambit of mindfulness is spread wide so that all body movement or posture; mental process; feeling or sensation; and phenomena that arise or appear are brought under this mindfulness sequentially in the order of their respective conspicuousness, as each arises." (P-80-81-82 A discourse on Vipassana Spritual Insight by Mahasi Sayadaw)

The above mentioned paragraphs are extracted from the Mahasi Sayadaw's books and I hope all of you will be satisfied with our discussion about the *Dhammanupassana* as instructed by Mahasi Sayadaw.

7. Conclusion

May I conclude my presentation, though we have to discuss a lot, about the *Dhammanupassana* as instructed by the most Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw. Let me stop here as we have not much time to be continued.

I would like to suggest that not to stop just by learning if you really love yourself and wish to try for your own salvation, please try to practise *Vipassana Bhavana* by *Satipatthana* method as instructed by Mahasi Sayadaw.

May you be able to note the five aggregates of grasping whenever they arise at the six doors. May you realize their impermanence, suffering and not-self nature. May you make quick progress in your insight and realized *Nibbana*, the end of all suffering.

10. List of Reference Books;

1. A Practical Way of Vipassana (Insight Meditation) Volume-1 by Mahasi Sayadaw,
2. Fundamentals of Vipassana Meditation by Mahasi Sayadaw,
3. Vipassana (Spritual Insight) by Mahasi Sayadaw,
4. Purpose of Practising Kammatthana Meditation by Mahasi Sayadaw,
5. Practical Vipassana Meditational Exercise by Mahasi Sayadaw,
6. Mahasatipatthana-Sutta by Mahasi Sayadaw,
7. Meditation Teacher's Records by The Experienced Meditation Masters by Saya Kyan and Saya Kywet,
8. Dhamma Discourses by Ven. Dr Jatila. Mahasi Ovadacariya Sayadaw,
9. A Manual of Abhidhamma by Narada Thera,
10. 'Contemplation of feeling or sensation in order to live in peace and harmony in our daily life by the Most Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw' the paper presented by Ven Dhammanana. at the third conference of ITBMU.
11. Mahasi Lineage and Posterity compiled by U Khin Maung Oo, EC member of BSNO,
12. Various Internet Website and books.